

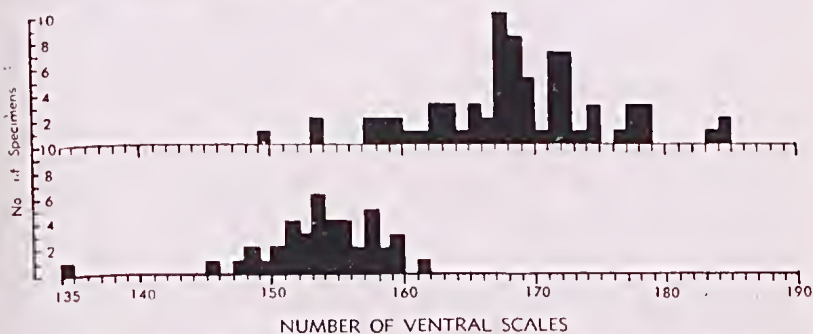
E.H.S. examined the supposed female through binoculars. In his opinion the bird was adult, a view supported to some extent by the comparatively early date. This bird had an unusually conspicuous white nuchal patch, otherwise the plumage was of the normal female type. The second bird was viewed closely by L.E.S. only and was considered comparatively uniform in coloration.

We suggest that what we saw was courtship feeding. E. A. Armstrong, *Bird Display*, quotes two cases of courtship feeding by extra-regional cuckoos.

—E. H. and L. E. SEDGWICK, Wooroloo.

**A Note on the Western Tiger Snake.**—In his paper, "The South Australian Reptile Fauna, Part 1 Ophidia" (*Rec. S.A. Mus.*, vol. ix, 1951, p. 554) Mr. F. J. Mitchell casts doubt upon the validity of my *Notechis scutatus occidentalis*, first described in vol. 1, no. 7, p. 139 of this journal. In the course of his remarks the author states, "a survey of the variation listed . . . indicates the body scale counts to be very variable and therefore of little diagnostic value."

Taking it for granted that Kinghorn's figures in his *Snakes of Australia* are incorrect, which seems more than probable, there does exist a definite difference between the numbers of ventrals of eastern and western forms. An examination of all records available to me comprising 112 specimens, of which 42 are Western Australian, gives the result shown in the figure below (upper graph, Eastern Australia; lower, Western Australia).



It will be seen that only one of the western snakes has more than 160 ventrals (162) and that but 7 of the others have less than 160. One of these, the one with 150, in the British Museum, may have come from this State though registered "Australia." The others are two each with 154, 158 and 159, which may also be Western Australian.

It is evident that a difference exists which cannot be lightly ignored. Coloration is admittedly unsatisfactory but one cannot fail to remark that not a single western specimen in the collection of the W.A. Museum shows the colours or the patterns of the eastern specimen in the collection or as shown in the illustrations of Kinghorn, McCoy and Krefft, or described by them.

As regards the *Notechis ater* of Krefft, the fact that intensive search in the type locality has failed to produce a single additional specimen suggests that this is not even a sub-species of *Notechis scutatus*, but merely an abnormality.

The examination of long series often reveals a remarkable variation in the head shields of a species.

—L. GLAUERT, W.A. Museum, Perth.

**A Melanistic Kookaburra.**—On November 10, 1950, after very stormy weather, Mr. Daryl Birch picked up a Kookaburra (*Dacelo gigas*) on the road near Mr. A. W. Gibbings' house in Coolup. This bird was delivered to me about 3 p.m. while still alive. It was a very dark specimen. Though very exhausted it attempted to "laugh" when handled—probably a shock reaction. It died during the night and was dissected and skinned next day.

The specimen, which is now in the Western Australian Museum, has all the underparts dark grey, tinged silver, caused by odd lighter feathers and silvery tips to some webs—all feathers having a dark base as in a normal specimen. The head, hind neck and back are silver-grey with similar markings to a normal specimen, but the dark brown line through eye appears more pronounced. Wings and tail similar to normal specimen, except the white patch on primaries, which has no green along the outer edge. It weighed 8 oz.; total length, 16½ in. Iris, dark brown; legs, greenish grey; beak, upper black, lower dirty white. Left testes, 1.31 x 0.82 cm.; vol., 0.45 ml.; right testes, 1.53 x 0.78 cm.; vol. 0.40 ml.

This bird was of great interest as Mrs. Gibbings, about June 21, 1950, had described to me a bird which was exactly like a Kookaburra, but black. On June 30 she phoned me to say the bird was around the house again. Though dinner was just served Mr. C. Young, who was staying with me, and myself decided to go over and see the strange bird. It was very quiet and easily observed at close quarters. Mrs. Gibbings' description of it was correct. It was a Kookaburra, but almost completely black. The only parts of the plumage which were normal were the blue spots on the wings, the white patch on the primaries and the upper tail feathers. The bird, which was perhaps a shade smaller than usual, appeared to have a red-brown iris.

This bird, according to Mrs. Gibbings, was usually on its own and over the next few months paid many visits to the house. It eventually mated with a bird of normal colour. There is little doubt that the specimen picked up was the same bird, as it was within the black bird's territorial limits and Mrs. Gibbings had noted that it was getting paler in colour. Also the black bird has not been seen since.

Though albinism is comparatively common in Kookaburras, melanism appears to be very rare. From the history of this specimen it would appear that it would probably have acquired normal plumage eventually.

—ANGUS ROBINSON, Coolup.